

... hunt continues for a LOST DUCK

The Coast Guard used to have a saying: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." This typified the mindset of Coast Guard aviators during World War II, symbolizing the bravery of a select few.

More than 68 years ago, on 28 November 1942, Lt. John Pritchard and Radioman First Class Benjamin Bottoms set out to locate and rescue the survivors of an Army Air Forces B-17 that crash-landed on Greenland's remote eastern coast near Koge Bay. The duo departed USCGC *Northland* (WPG 49) in their J2F-4 Grumman Duck, located the B-17, and safely landed their craft on the ice cap, carefully avoiding large crevasses in the process.

Pritchard and Bottoms navigated the terrain to the B-17, assisted two of the most severely injured back to the Duck, and took off down the fjord toward Koge Bay before approaching weather could prevent them from returning to *Northland*. They would have to repeat their journey if they were going to retrieve the remaining survivors the next day.

On 29 November 1942, Pritchard and Bottoms again landed on the icecap about a mile from the B-17. Cpl. Loren Howorth ran out to warn Pritchard of a fast-moving storm closing in, which would prevent the crew from safely picking up additional survivors. Pritchard and Bottoms readied the aircraft for a quick departure while Howorth jumped aboard. They quickly took off down the fjord when they encountered formidable weather that reduced visibility to near zero.

Unable to reference the landmarks necessary to navigate visually, Pritchard began a shallow turn in an attempt to climb above and out of the fog and precipitation to establish a line of bearing to *Northland*. It is suspected that while performing this maneuver, the Duck impacted the ice cap at approximately 2,000 feet above sea level and approximately 10 miles from where they took off. Flights in the days following the mishap confirmed that the small aircraft had indeed crashed and there were no surviving personnel. Because of the difficulty in reaching the crash site at the



*Lt. John Pritchard and Radioman Benjamin Bottoms about to take off in their J2F Duck to rescue downed U.S. Army fliers on Greenland's remote east coast on 28 November 1942.
(all photos from U.S. Coast Guard)*

By Cmdr. James Blow, USCG

time, no expeditions reached the crash site or recovered any remains. Supplies were air-dropped to the remaining six crewmen of the B-17, who were finally rescued in April 1943. All signs of the aircraft disappeared under the ice and snow sometime in the 1960s, and the aircraft remains under the ice today.

In February 2008, with inspiration from The Ancient Order of the Pterodactyls (the Coast Guard Aviation Association) and retired Coast Guard members, the Coast Guard's Office of Aviation Forces embarked on the quest to locate and recover the lost aircraft and return these World War II veterans to their rightful resting place on U.S. soil.

Through historical research, enough information was obtained to provide a starting point for an initial search area. Given advances in sensor technologies, the Office of Aviation Forces worked with the Naval Research Laboratory, VXS-1, and NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory to obtain sensor and ice-penetrating radar sweeps of the suspected area. While not conclusive, the sensor and radar returns revealed several irregular objects beneath the snow. In 2009, a 10-person team visited the site with GPS markers and a portable ground-penetrating radar (GPR). Again, the results were inconclusive, but the returns did reveal an anomaly beneath the ice in the approximated position.

Armed with this information, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command approved a mission to probe the site for positive confirmation. Unfortunately, competing demands from other repatriation missions consumed available funding,



Naval Aviation News

delaying the mission to confirm the suspected site. In August 2010, the Coast Guard contracted with North South Polar—a private organization that specializes in finding and recovering the remains of missing military personnel—to assist in recovering the lost Duck and its crew.

North South Polar employed the latest in GPR technology, a gradiometer, remote micro-camera technology, and an innovative non-invasive hot water boring device. This equipment, along with a team including a geophysicist, NASA engineer, arctic specialist, media representatives, and Coast Guard personnel departed the United States for Greenland on 27 August 2010 for a week-long site survey to relocate and corroborate the anomaly suspected to be that of the missing aircraft and crew. The team arrived in Kulusuk, Greenland, on 28 August.

A regional air carrier provided further transport to the remote ice cap on 29 August, where camp was established in a base area of exposed rock approximately 300 yards from the primary site of interest. Work began immediately with emphasis on relocating and marking the anomaly discovered during the 2008 Naval Research Laboratory P-3 overflight and the subsequent ground expedition. The primary anomaly and several secondary anomalies were confirmed on the second day, located approximately 105 feet below the ice surface. By the end of the second day, the hot water probe device was configured for boring through layers of ice to the suspected targets. The device took approximately one hour to bore down 115 feet beneath the surface. At the anticipated depth of 105 feet no solid material such as wood or metal was encountered.

The probing was expanded outward from the initial hole in a circular 360-degree pattern. Large air bubbles were seen

at the surface when the probe passed through the anomaly's depth. Subsequent investigation with a remotely operated fish-eye micro-camera, however, confirmed nothing but ice at the location and air may have been trapped within voids in the ice and released when the probe passed through them. Eight holes were probed around the initial bore site without contacting anything indicative of an airframe structure.

The weather closed in on the second day, bringing consistent heavy rain, winds, fog, and low ceilings. Temperatures averaged 35 degrees at night and 45 degrees during the day. The weather-glazed ice coupled with the crevassed terrain in the area prevented exploration and validation of the secondary site.



Supplies are dropped to the expedition at Koge Bay, Greenland, during their search in August 2010 for the wreck of the Duck.

Although the team confirmed the aircraft was not at the primary site as was hoped, a great deal of work was completed on the ice cap, which will be of considerable value going forward. This experience was already applied in development of a concentrated search area for a second P-3 overflight the Office of Aviation Forces has coordinated with NASA. Information obtained from this upcoming flight will be corroborated with other independent sources in an effort to further narrow the Duck's location.

The tenacious support and backing of Coast Guard retirees, family, friends, and the general public continues to gain momentum. Congressional interest has grown, with the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2010 (which imposed additional requirements for accounting for missing armed forces personnel) and the recent influx of inquiries on behalf of various constituents. The Coast Guard's Office of Aviation Forces is keeping the effort alive to locate the Coast Guard's J2F-4 Grumman Duck and bring home Pritchard, Bottoms, and Howorth.



Cmdr. Blow serves in the Coast Guard's Office of Aviation Forces, and is project lead for the "Duck Hunt."



The team, led by the Coast Guard's Office of Aviation Forces, camped near an anomaly in the ice discovered during expeditions conducted in 2008 and 2009.